

## SOIL CONSUMPTION FOR HOUSING

The use of the land for residential purposes entails various environmental impacts: use of the land as a resource which is not easily renewable, artificialisation of the land and soil sealing, modification of the natural water cycle, disappearance of natural habitats, etc.

### Continued urbanisation

Between 1990 and 2015, the area dedicated to residential land<sup>1</sup> in Wallonia increased by 37.4%, from 77,138 ha to 105,967 ha (or 60% of artificialised land), while over the same period, the Walloon population grew by only 10.7%. The increase in residential area is not only linked to population growth, but also to growth in the number of private households<sup>2</sup> (+ 20.6% between 1990 and 2015) and higher per household land use. As such, between 1990 and 2015, the average residential area per household<sup>3</sup> increased by 13.9%, from 601 m<sup>2</sup>/household to 684 m<sup>2</sup>/household. However, since the early 2000s, this growth has undergone a downward trend, reflecting the adoption of house building methods which are more sparing of the land.

### Spatial variability

In 2015, the average residential area per household varied considerably between Walloon municipalities (from 173 m<sup>2</sup>/household to 1,988 m<sup>2</sup>/household), with the municipalities of the main urban agglomerations characterised by relatively dense urbanisation<sup>4</sup>. In addition, between 2003 and 2015, some municipalities (73 out of 262) showed a favourable trend in terms of densification<sup>5</sup>, while a large part of the territory, especially in southern Wallonia, was still in the process of loosening up residential housing<sup>4</sup>.

### Residential loosening: multiple explanatory factors

This dynamic of residential loosening can be explained by various

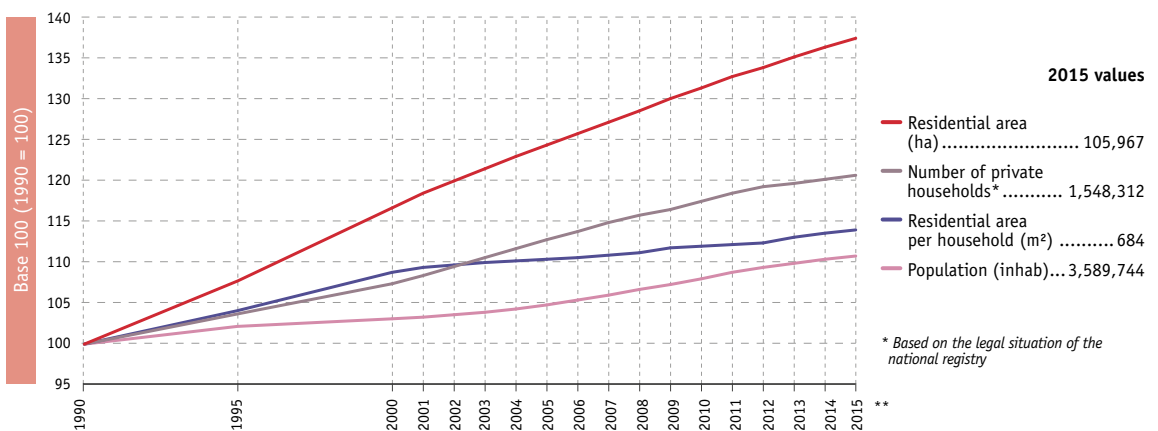
factors<sup>6</sup>: attractive land prices; large availability in residential areas with sector plans, particularly in those most remote from urban centres; demand for large residential plots; municipal management which does not use land sparingly.

### Towards sustainable and sparing land use?

In the medium to long term, growth in the population and households is anticipated<sup>7</sup>. This outlook will increase the demand for housing. The policies implemented in terms of land use planning and housing will be decisive in relation to the environmental impacts of this growth. The adoption of quantified targets for land use, as recommended by the European Commission<sup>8</sup>, is therefore a necessary step in assessing the trajectory of Wallonia. In addition, with a view to the sustainable and sparing use of the land, certain options should be favoured, such as encouraging the reconstruction of the city over the city, adopting a proactive policy in terms of housing densities on virgin land, and placing vacant houses back on the market<sup>9</sup>.

[1] Plots of land occupied by dwellings, but also their built annexes (garages, etc.) and non-built annexes (gardens, etc.) | [2] Based on the legal status of the national registry | [3] Average number of square metres occupied per household for living | [4] → Map 18 | [5] → HOUSE 2 | [6] From Chartier & Reginster, 2010 | [7] → SOCIOECO 2; FPB & FPS Economy - DG Statistics, 2016 | [8] EC, 2012 | [9] Chartier *et al.*, 2013

Fig. HOUSE 1-1 Residential area in Wallonia



\*\* Missing data for years not mentioned

SOERW 2017 – Sources: FPS Finance - AGDP (Bodem/Sol database); FPS Economy - DG Statistics/TWEPS & DEMNA calculations based on IWEPS/DG03/CPDT classifications (2008)